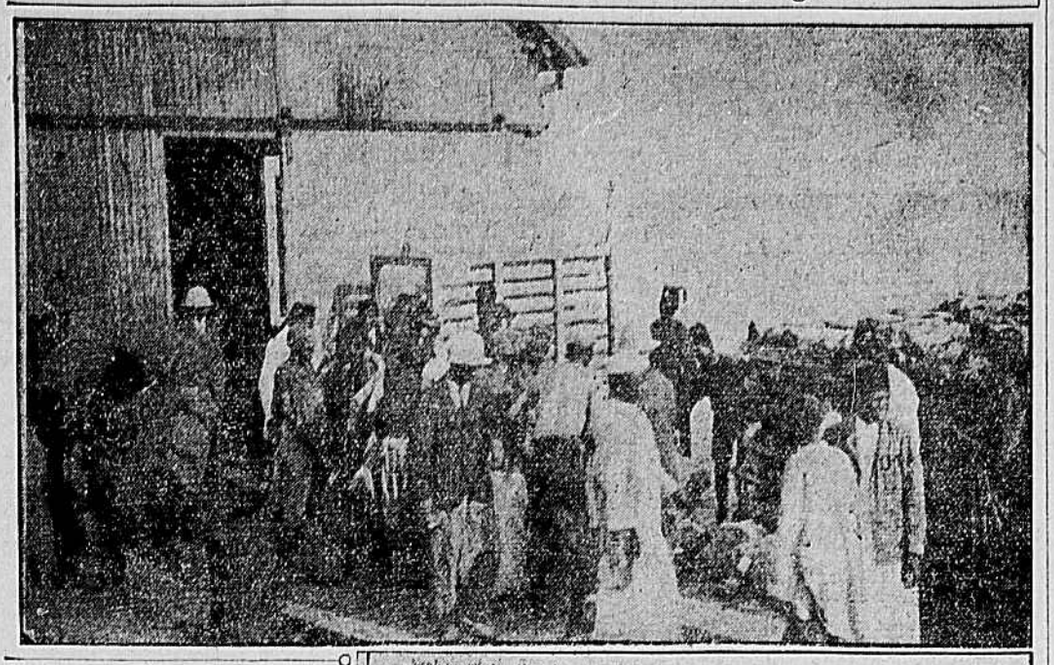
Landing on Victoria Lake at Entebbe, Uganda



WORLD'S BIGGEST FRESH WATER BODY

(Continued From First Page.)

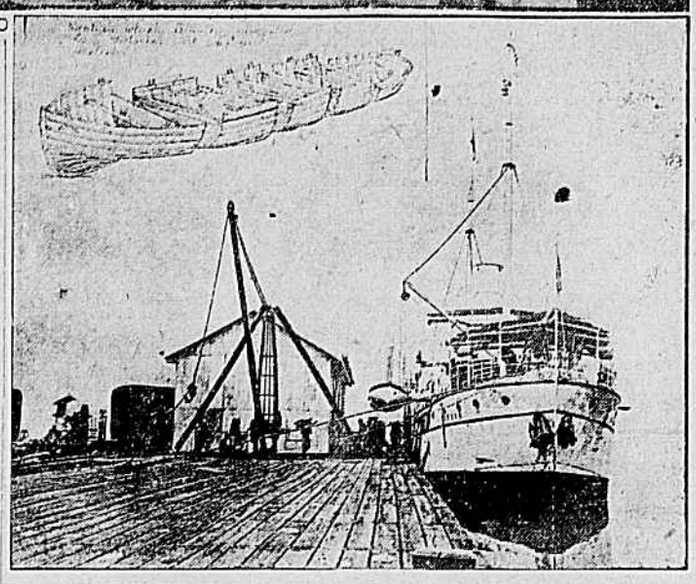
It is only half as long, and it has three times the area of Lake Chad, which lies away off to the northwest, above the French Kongo, on the southern edge of the Sahara. Lake Victoria is almost quadrilateral in shape. Tanganyika is a long, narrow trough between high hills. Nyassa is long and narrow, and so are Lake Rudolf and Albert Nyanza at the north.

Victoria Nyanza is more like our own Lake Superior than any of the other great bodies of fresh water. It lies in the highlands, and might be said to be on the roof of the African continent, as Superior is on the eastern roof of the North American continent. Lake Victoria is, however, more than six times as high up in the air as Lake Superior, and more than seven times as high as Huron or Michigan. It is about 4,000 feet above the sea, and is within 500 feet of the altitude of the Great Salt Lake.

As to the depth of the lake, its bottom has not been carefully surveyed, but there are places which measure over 600 feet. This is about three times the depth of Lake Erie, but not nearly so deep as Lakes Superior, Huron and Michigan. This lake has a mighty volume of water, and its surface rises forty or fifty inches during some years. The volume is so great that a dam might be placed at the source of the Nile and give water for irrigation for vast territories along the course of that river which are now undreamed of. As to this matter, however, I will write in the future.

In Black Africa.

Until within the past few years this region was one of the blackest parts of the African continent. Slavery was common everywhere and cannibalism rife. No one knew there was a lake here at all until 1858, when Speke discovered the southern shores; and we had no idea of its extent until our own Henry M. Stanley went around the lake in 1875. As it is now, about the only inhabitants are these queer tribes of African natives, who in certain regions are still warring with one another. I have described the naked Kavirondo and some of their queer customs.



THE SYBIL AT THE WHARF AT PORT FLORENCE.

North of Victoria Nyanza are natives who are as far different from them as we Americans are different from the Japanese or Chinese. On the south are other tribes with other strange customs, and the whole lake is surrounded by a dozen or more different peoples, each differing from all the others in appearance and in their various grades of civilization.

Navigating Lake Victoria in 1908.

No European boat had ever been seen on this lake until Stanley came, and he was told that the lake was so large that it would take several years to go around it. Before that the boats were such as we now see used by the natives. They consist of boards sewed together with fibre of the raphia palm, and can only be kept from sinking by incessant bailing. I saw many of them at Port Florence, and they are used more or less all around the lake. The average boat is twenty-five feet or more feet long, three feet wide and two feet deep. It is made without nails or any iron whatsoever, and is seldom fitted with sails. It is easily capsized in a storm, at which time the boatmen often jump outside and hold on to the rim of the boat to keep from sinking until the storm is over.

Stanley made a big rowboat, which he called the Lady Alice. He started at Speke Gulf and by using a sail gradually made his way around, covering many of the points at which I shall call farther on in these journeys.

At present there are four little steamers, belonging to the British, on Lake Victoria. One of these is the Sir William McKinnon, which was brought up from the ocean in pieces before the Uganda railway was built and here put together. It is still in commission and is used by the British officials as a sort of a dispatch boat.

The next two steamers are the Sybil and Winnifred, each of about 600 tons, and the other is the Sir Clement Hill, which has 800 tons and which was launched last year. The Sybil and Winnifred are sister ships. They make regular trips around the lake, in connection with the Uganda railway, the voyage from port to port requiring about ten days. It is upon the Sybil that I am writing this letter.

A Mid-African Steamer.

I wish I could show you this little African steamer. If it could be taken up and transported to one of our American rivers, or dropped down upon Lake Huron or Erie, it would not seem much out of place; for the ship is just about the same as some used on our lakes. The differences lie in the people and the management. The Sybil moves by a screw. It has a smoke stack in the centre and two masts before and behind, with a lifeboat on deck. It has about a dozen cabins, with a dark little dining saloon in the rear. The cabins are lighted by electricity and each has an electric fan. Back of the dining saloon is a ledge up under the port holes where the second-class passengers sleep. The top deck has a double awning of canvas to protect us from the tropical sun, and at midday we are advised to keep our hats on while sitting under it, the sun's rays are strong in this latitude, and one must protect his head even when indoors if the roof is not thick.

As to first-class passengers we have only about a half dozen on the Sybil, and they and the English officers are the only Europeans. The sailors are half-naked natives, who get wages of about 10 cents a day, and the steward and cooks are Hindoos, who are paid a little more.

The passengers are two British officials on their way to serve in interior Uganda, a German surgeon who is bound for Mwanza, in the Kaiser's territories, on the south of the lake; a Congo trader who has about a cartload of beads and brass wire with him to buy ivory and rubber, and a missionary who is going to Kanpala, and who will get off at Entebbe. In addition to these are myself and son, who will leave the boat at Entebbe for Uganda.

We have also on board a half dozen native soldiers and one of these is always guarding the mail. The bags were carried, under guard, on to the boat at Port Florence, and a soldier with a gun in his hand stands beside them day and night throughout the voyage.

A Coming Tourist Centre.

The prospect is that Lake Victoria will some day be as well known to the globe-trotter as the Great Lakes of America. The expense of coming here is too high for the ordinary traveler but the man who can pay the bills can live on these boats almost as comfortably as at home. I mean as far as eating and drinking are concerned, and as respects the climate. There is much to be desired in the matter of freedom from cockroaches, rats and other insects. I have never seen so many and such wild animals of the roach kind before. My cabin has some as large as mice, and it seems to me that they come out in the daytime and look at one while they sharpen their teeth in order to trouble him the better at night. The roaches run through the dining rooms, and when I put my foot on one, as I do whenever it is possible, it leaves a grease spot as large as my hand on the floor.

Another infernal insect is the jigger. I don't know where I got mine, whether on shore or on ship, but my native boy has extracted the eggs of three of these pests from under my toes during the voyage. The jigger is a little insect which bores a hole in one's flesh, choosing the foot and usually places under the toenails. It lays its eggs there in the form of a little sack about as big as a pearl shirt button, and this sack must be cut out at once. If not and the eggs hatch they turn into worms which eat about through the flesh and often cause the loss of the toe. The insect is supposed to have originally come from South America, but it has already traveled over this half of Africa and it is especially bad about Lake Victoria.

Waterspouts of Flies.

As to mosquitoes, we have none here on the lake and practically no flies except the common house fly. The shores are infested with the tsetse fly, whose bite causes the sleeping sickness; but this lives only in the swamps and cannot stand the light of the sun. There are plenty of mosquitoes of all kinds on land, and there are swarms of midges in many parts of the lake; I saw such a swarm this morning. It looked like a waterspout rising from the surface. I thought it was one, and was surprised when the captain told me that it was composed of myriads of these midges, which are born in the water and fly up at one time into the air. They sweep over the lake in great numbers, raining down upon the boats as though they were so much black pepper. They come in such quantities that the men sweep them up with brooms and throw them overboard. They even get into the cabins and cover the dining tables. This is so when the ports are covered with netting and when every open space is apparently protected. These flies are perfectly harmless, and they do not live more than a day.

What One Eats on Lake Victoria.

As to other matters, as I have said, the accommodations on the boats are good. We have four or five meals a day, and the Hindoos cook well. This morning, for instance, I was awakened by my black boy at 7, who brought me a cup of tea and a cracker. At 8:30 the breakfast bell rang and I went into the saloon for a substantial meal of an orange, some fried herring, bacon and eggs, with marmalade and toast at the end. The coffee served was grown about the lake and was poorly made, but the tea, which I next ordered, was good.

At 1 o'clock we had a lunch of pea soup, boiled tongue, roast mutton and chicken curry with rice, ending up with a dessert of California canned apricots and native fruits. We shall have dinner at 8 o'clock to-night, and our table will be lighted by electricity. The meal will be about the same as the lunch, and we shall probably drink with it a glass or so of ginger ale, while our English friends will wash their throats with whiskey or soda or wine or beer, as they order. The cost of such meals is $1.65 a day, with extra charges for drinks. I have before me the wine list and give a few of the prices. A full peg of whiskey and soda costs 8 annas, or about 25 cents, while a half peg costs 15 cents. Brandy may be had at the same prices. The word, "pegs" for "drinks" is used here on all bills of fare. This is common throughout India, and it arises from an old saying that every drink of intoxicating liquors one takes is a peg in his coffin. If you want a man to take a drink with you, you ask him to come and have a peg, and there are certain hours of the day which are known as "peg times" or simply "pegs."

As for me, I am drinking the water of the lake. Our missionary on board tells me that it is perfectly safe, and I know it tastes as sweet as the waters of Lake Erie.

The Islands of Lake Victoria.

As I write we are coming near land. During a great part of to-day we have been out of sight of anything but islands. Victoria Nyanza is 225 miles wide and 275 miles long, and there are places where one can travel for 100 miles or so and not see land.

Here in the north the shores are bordered with beautiful islands, some of which are wooded. Others have grassy hills along the shores, with high lands behind them. Some regions make one think of the Thousand Islands of the St. Lawrence, and many of the islets would not be out of place if they were off the shores of Ireland or in the English Channel. These places have a settled look, and at a distance the country appears just like ours, save that it lacks houses and barns and has thatched villages instead.

The Shores of Uganda.

We are now nearing the shores of Uganda. The scenes from the ship are more like those of a settled civilized territory than the heart of the black continent. The landscape reminds me of that along our great lakes. Much of the ground is cleared and there are clumps of dark green woods here and there. In one place there is what seems to be a series of fields where the wheat or corn has just been harvested, the shocks standing out among the yellow stubble. These shocks dot the country as regularly as though they were so many shocks of grain, and as we passed them I had a discussion with a fellow-traveler as to whether they might be wheat or corn. I bet upon the wheat and my friend bet upon corn. We left the question to the captain, who brought out his glass and showed us that what we thought were shocks of grain were really mounds of yellow clay, the homes of white ants.